

# The Mystery of Lieutenant Colonel Commandant Anthony Gale

Story by Robert T. Jordan

Photos and illustrations courtesy of the author

*Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Gale, fourth Commandant of the Marine Corps and the only one ever fired, was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 17 Sept. 1782. Fewer records survive concerning him than those concerning any other Commandant. Even his final resting place is unknown.*

Among the portraits of Commandants of the Marine Corps, one is notable by its absence—that of Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Gale, fourth Commandant of the Marine Corps from 3 March 1819 until 16 Oct. 1820. The scrappy Irishman’s antics were such an embarrassment to the Marine Corps that for years his name was seldom mentioned.

The 23rd Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene Jr., hoped to change that. In 1966, he appointed a pair of Marines to conduct an investigation into what happened to Gale after the Corps dismissed him in 1820. He suspected the “knobs” (small hills) of south-central Kentucky where Gale lived out his final years might have answers. Greene hoped the team might locate Gale’s burial site and a male descendant whose likeness might provide an artist an idea of how Gale might have looked.

Marine Corps photographer Gunnery Sergeant Bob Mosier teamed with curator Richard Long from the Marine Corps Museum to locate Gale’s final resting place, but without success. Suggesting that I continue the search, Long offered me a photo of Gale’s daughter and much of the material from Mosier and his investigation.

Looking for clues about Anthony Gale’s final resting place required numerous visits to historical archives and the town of Stanford, Ky.

## Swashbuckler and Duelist

Gale migrated to the United States in 1793. To save money, the government temporarily abolished the Marine Corps after the Revolution. When President John



Limited records of Gale’s brief service as Commandant are available, and there is no known image or portrait.

Adams authorized the formation of the Marine Corps on 11 July 1798, Gale was among the first to apply for a commission as a second lieutenant, which he received on 2 Sept. 1798. He was first assigned recruiting duty in Philadelphia where he also was responsible for guarding prisoners of the quasi-war with France.

Gale’s first sea-duty assignment was on the 24-gun frigate *Ganges*. He thrived as a seagoing officer. In quick succession, he directed his Marine Detachment in forays against the Barbary pirates and the British. But when Navy Lieutenant Allan MacKensie relieved one of Gale’s Marine sentries and placed him in irons, Gale’s Irish temper exploded. Gale reportedly called MacKensie a “rascal” and struck him across the face. The hapless Navy officer accepted a duel, thus sealing his fate.

Gale killed MacKensie in the duel and forwarded a report to Commandant William Ward Burrows. In a letter to another Marine officer, Lieutenant Colonel Bur-

rows suggested Gale’s action would cause Navy officers to treat Marines and their officers “with some respect.”

In 1801, Gale received a promotion to first lieutenant and an assignment to Marine Barracks, Philadelphia. He became a U.S. citizen, met and married Catherine Swope, the daughter of the Rev. Benedict Swope, and was numbered ninth of 18 first lieutenants.

In addition to the 18 first lieutenants, the Corps included a lieutenant colonel Commandant, four captains and 18 second lieutenants. Throughout his career, Gale would alternate service ashore with sea duty aboard other ships, including USS *President* and *Constitution*. His detachment or guard (depending on the size of the ship) might be comprised of three sergeants, three corporals, one armorer, one drummer, one fifer and 50 privates. Typically, a first and second lieutenant, or a captain and a first lieutenant of Marines would command such a large guard.



Gale's early service must have been without fault since he was promoted to captain in 1804, then quickly awarded "brevet major," usually a meritorious promotion for exemplary or heroic service. He received \$40 a month as the senior captain in the Marine Corps, a raise of \$10. He began to spend more time at home and less at sea since senior officers were responsible for recruiting and training troops and maintaining the barracks. Gale's career prospered under Commandant Burrows, who may have overlooked Gale's flaws.

Commandant LtCol Franklin Wharton, who replaced Commandant Burrows, was much less forgiving. Complaints began to arrive at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., of Gale's bouts with the bottle, lack of attention to detail in managing the barracks and suspicions that he was misappropriating funds to refurbish his Philadelphia home.

#### **Commandant Franklin Wharton**

Wharton ordered a court of inquiry, which cleared Gale, but Wharton then banished Gale to New Orleans where he nursed a feeling of persecution with regular doses of John Barleycorn. When Wharton died in 1818, Gale was the next senior officer in the Marine Corps.

The Corps divided into two factions—one aligned with Wharton and the other with Major Archibald Henderson. Those who backed Henderson charged the Wharton group with being overly concerned with their private lives and business ventures to the detriment of their professional duties.

Gale did not support either faction, preferring to focus on commanding his barracks with the hope that Headquarters Marine Corps and the Navy might leave him alone. However, his clashes with Wharton left him vulnerable. Clearly the senior Marine at the time, he nevertheless faced a tough fight as both sides rushed to have him disqualified.

#### **Battle for Commandant**

Maj Archibald Henderson, second in line, bluntly questioned the Secretary of the Navy about Gale's qualifications. After a court of inquiry exonerated him, Maj Gale, with 21 years of service, became Lieutenant Colonel Commandant on 3 March 1819. The Corps had been without a leader for six months. Gale commanded 47 officers and 875 enlisted Marines, most serving in detachments aboard 58 warships of various sizes. Gale's victory proved shallow indeed. He inherited a position that was grossly ill defined.

Navy Secretary Smith Thompson fre-

quently countermanded LtCol Gale's orders in a humiliating manner. Subordinates wrote to the Navy Secretary or the President to have their orders changed or to ask for special requests.

LtCol Gale courageously submitted a letter analyzing how he felt the proper division of function should be between himself and the Secretary, and respectfully pointed out the impossibility of his position. No response to his entreaties exist. Gale drowned his disappointment

cusor, the adjutant and inspector, Maj Samuel Miller, also prosecuted the case. The court found Gale guilty on 8 Oct. 1820, and he was removed from office and the Marine Corps on 16 Oct.

#### **From Disgrace to Poverty and Death**

Gale joined his family in Philadelphia where he spent several months in hospitals. With help from his wife's sister, the family moved to a log cabin on 158 acres of land along the Dix River in Lincoln



**Emily Gale Campbell (left), the daughter of Anthony and Catherine Gale, married William S. Campbell in 1830. The Campbells had a family cemetery that the author visited, finding no indications of Anthony Gale's burial plot.**

County, Ky. Unfortunately, Gale proved not to be a farmer, and his family struggled to make a living. Gale returned to the bottle to ease his disappointment and pain.

The disgraced former Commandant of Marines spent the next 15 years citing his medical records as proof that he was temporarily mentally impaired, which led to his bizarre behavior. By 1820 standards, it was not uncommon for the nation's warrior caste to be hard fighting, hard drinking and a bit rough around the edges. In historical perspective, Gale possibly was set up to fail by his enemies both within and outside the Corps.

The government partially cleared Gale in 1835, awarding him a stipend of \$15 a month, which later was increased to \$25 and continued until his death by "lung disease" in 1843.

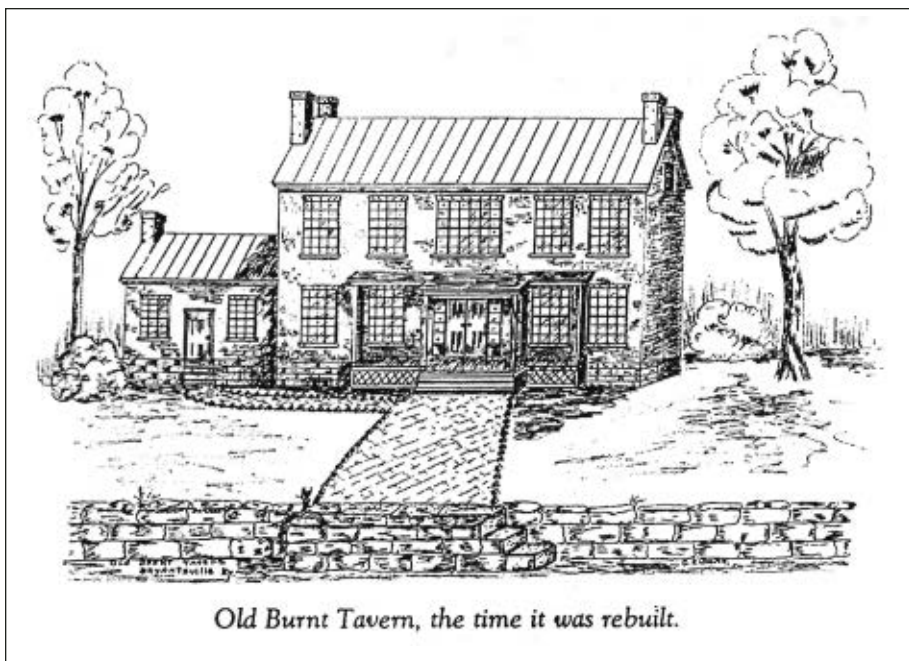
#### **Searching for the Commandant's Grave**

The search for Gale began at the Archive Section of the Stanford Courthouse. At the entrance of the courthouse, a his-

by drinking, womanizing and directing abusive verbal assaults at his staff.

Three weeks later Gale was placed under house arrest, charged with drunkenness, conduct unbecoming an officer, signing false documents and leaving his quarters without permission. Gale cited mental instability as his defense. His ac-





**Records indicate Gale stayed at the Old Burnt Tavern, which stood in Lincoln County. Campbell's Cemetery (above) still exists in Lincoln County, one of the original counties in the Kentucky territory of Virginia.**

torical plaque contains the names of Revolutionary War veterans who lived in Lincoln County. Among them was Anthony Gale, despite the fact that he did not enter service until after the war ended.

In a hand-bound journal in the basement catacomb was the 30 June 1830 marriage bond for Gale's daughter, Emily, and William S. Campbell. In a power of attorney, dated 12 Sept. 1833, Gale delegated authority to his son, William A. Gale, "To recover and receive of any person or persons whatever, particularly of the government of the United States, in default of payment thereof, to have use and take all lawful ways and

means in my name and otherwise for the recovery of same." Two months later, a land deed recorded Gale's sale of his land on the Dix River to Lewis Southard and wife.

On 15 Jan. 1834, Gale's son, William, posted a surety bond of 50 pounds for marriage to Milly A. Moorehead. There is speculation that the 69-year-old Gale's health was failing and that he could hardly take care of himself and probably lived at times with his son. Still, on 3 Sept. 1834, Gale's sister-in-law, Margaret Swope, deeded a tract of land on Gilbert's Creek to her sister Catherine.

The Kentucky Historical Society, the

microfilmed records in the Lexington Library's research center and databases of local cemeteries revealed very little. There were locations where Gale lived, where he mailed his letters and the Old Burnt Tavern where he sought lodging. He was living with his son when tuberculosis ended the swashbuckler's life. Searching phone directories for prospective descendants and writing articles in Kentucky genealogy journals seeking information on Gale or any family members revealed nothing.

Gale's sons reportedly thought he had been a quartermaster in the Marines. Several of them served in the Civil War, but it appears that they moved from Kentucky, and Gale's heirs have been lost through time.

Complicating the search is the fact that many Kentucky burial records of that period don't contain information for individuals buried on rural farms, in family cemeteries or marked with blank fieldstones in order to protect the dead from desecration by marauding Indians who might dig them up just to take their scalp.

The Campbell Cemetery situated atop a knob southwest of Stanford failed to reveal any records of Gale's funeral or burial.

It made sense that Gale's family probably lacked the means to provide him with anything more than the bare essentials of a Christian burial. To reach the cemetery owned by his son-in-law's family, take SR 78 to Turnersville, then left on SR 198 to the third exit on the left, then one mile down a dirt road before following a dry creek bed up the hill to the cemetery. (However, the day I went, the creek was not "dry" ... nor were the muddy fields surrounding it.)

At the overgrown and vandalized burial site, few names or dates are legible. In the middle of the other tilted and broken stones is a large vault, its cover left askew by vandals. No name or date can be read. If that is Gale's final resting place, there is no way to prove it. Even modern technology cannot match Gale's DNA to any descendant.

Anthony Gale, fourth Commandant of the Marine Corps, remains a mystery and a void in the rich tapestry of our Corps' history.

*Editor's note: Bob Jordan, a former Leatherneck associate editor, is a freelance writer based in Longwood, Fla. He served in Vietnam and Beirut as a Marine Corps combat correspondent and public affairs officer. He recently teamed with Don Philpott to write "Terror: Is America Safe?," available through the MCA bookstores.*

